

Interview with Normand Fissett
Conducted by Janet Kerr Tener for the
Providence District History Project Providence Perspective

Janet: Good Morning we are at the offices of Supervisor Linda Smyth of the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors today is August 21st, 2011 Thursday and this is Janet Tener a volunteer participant in the Providence Prospective Project. Also with me is Linda Byrne a staff member for Linda Smyth and our guest of honor today is Mr. Normand Fissett and longtime Oakton resident who is going to share some of his reminisces with us.

Mr. Fissett I just wanted to start by asking you a little bit about your background. Where were you born and raised and what schools, colleges did you attend and did you ever serve in the military?

Norm: Yes. I was born in Falls River, Massachusetts a long time ago in 1923 which will make me 85 years old in October. I served in the Navy for World War II starting in December of 1942 until May of 1946. And then I made the mistake of staying in the reserves and got called back for the Korea crisis in 1950 three months after we were married.

Fortunately I had a pretty good assignment I got ordered to the Washington area here with Naval Intelligence and I did not have to cross the Pacific fortunately.

Janet: Where was the Naval Intelligence operation based?

Norm: Washington.

Janet: In the Pentagon or

Norm: In the Pentagon.

Janet: In the Pentagon, okay. And what year would that have been?

Norm: That would have been 1950 to 1952.

Janet: Okay, and you mentioned that you were married at that point and tell us a little bit about your wife.

Norm: Well my wife was a native of my home town we attended the same grade schools in fact her father and my mother when they were single dated a few times. (chuckle) I met my wife on a blind date and fortunately both of our eyes were open so we were married in May of 1950 and in September of 1950 is when I got – in fact the day we came back from our honeymoon the next day was a Sunday and that's when the headlines hit Korea crisis

Janet: Oh, my goodness.

Norm: So I told her you're going to be a Navy wife because I was going to get called back in.

Janet: Wow.

Norm: And it happened you know but she adjusted pretty well to it.

Janet: And where did you make your home when you first had to come to the Naval Intelligence Center.

Norm: First home, first home in this area was an apartment off of Columbia Pike in Arlington.

Janet: Um hum.

Norm: And we stayed there until – just about two years and then moved over to Seven Corners in the Wilston Apartments.

Janet: Um hum.

Norm: And stayed there until I guess four or five years until we rented a house over there off of Annandale Road. And eventually in 1959 we moved to Vienna.

Janet: Okay.

Norm: Vienna Woods – that's when you could get a nice little house for sixteen thousand nine hundred.

Janet: Oh

Norm: (laughing)

Janet: Yes, the same time my parents moved to Fairfax County and they paid twelve thousand for their little house in Springfield. (laughing)

Norm: And I sold that house in 1978 for a high price of sixty eight thousand.

Janet: Wow.

Norm: Which was high at the time.

Janet: Oh, yes.

Norm: It's one of the better deals on that circle you know.

Janet: Wow. And where did you move at that point in 1978 after you

Norm: In 1978 moved to Oakton Glen.

Janet: Ah ha.

Norm: Because still with a Vienna address – the mailing address still Vienna,

Janet: Um hum.

Norm: You well know, and been there ever since.

Janet: So Oakton Glen was built in the late 1970's?

Norm: 1978 we were original owners.

Janet: Hum, that's an interesting neighborhood because it is one of the more lovely neighborhoods in the area and a lot of people don't know about it which, I mean they drive by the entrance obviously but if you have occasion to go back there you realize what a gorgeous neighborhood with all the trees and they preserved the kind of roll, just a little bit of a rolling landscape.

Norm: It's a well-kept neighborhood.

Janet: Yes, it's a beautiful neighborhood.

Norm: Not that many facilities, no swimming pool of course but there's a tennis court which I never used in all my years.

Janet: Um hum.

Norm: There's a bike trail or a walking trail.

Janet: Um hum.

Norm: And quite a few people – original owners are still in there.

Linda: The original farmhouse that sits kind of as the gateway as your turn in there

Norm: The big house?

Linda: Yeah.

Norm: That big lot in front?

Linda: Yes, and then isn't there a schoolhouse next to it that's been converted into a home – a small – it was a one room schoolhouse at one time I believe?

Norm: Yeah that would, I don't know now, my memory's not all that good sometimes of exactly where it was but I think it was right behind that big property.

Linda: Yes.

Norm: Now the front of that property belongs to the Association.

Janet: Oh it does.

Norm: It doesn't belong to that big house.

Janet: Oh, is that why they have practices sometimes there, I see their little

Norm: Yes

Janet: girls out doing soccer.

Norm: Kids practice there you know.

Janet: Um hum. That's wonderful.

Norm: That belongs to the Association.

Janet: So do they, do community groups have, are they allowed to approach the Association to use it or is it just family groups or people within the community who can ask for permission?

Norm: I think the Association grants permission to use it.

Janet: I see, um hum.

Norm: The ah, the Annual Picnic is not held there it's held further down on Oakton Glen Drive.

Janet: Um hum.

Norm: But there's a little opening on both sides.

Janet: So the Annual Picnic is something the community has done since the beginning do you think?

Norm: Ever since I remember.

Janet: Ah um.

Norm: I'm not very much of a picnic goer to those gatherings but they seem to have a lot of fun; especially for the kids. You know they have games

Janet: Um hum.

Norm: for the kids and everybody brings food.

Janet: Um hum, well I'm curious about why you sold your house in Vienna Woods and opted for Oakton Glen. What made you decide to do that?

Norm: Well, I always wanted a colonial.

Janet: Um hum.

Norm: Now I want to go back to something smaller.

Janet and Norm and Linda: (Laughing.)

Norm: And in 1978 let's say when I put my house on the market and I had helped a lot of other people on the Circle sell they houses because I was doing Real Estate also. I did it on a part time basis for a while.

Janet: Um hum.

Norm: While I was working for the government.

Janet: Um hum.

Norm: And then I retired from the government in 1981 and then sort of switched gears and picked up Real Estate as a second career pretty much at my own pace.

Janet: Um hum.

Norm: And I'm still doing it.

Janet: Wow.

Norm: My son now is helping me. He's been with me for about five or six years.

Janet: Um. How many children did you all have at the time that you moved?

Norm: Two.

Janet: To Oakton Glen?

Norm: Two sons, Paul and Dan. Paul is the oldest son and he still lives with me.

Janet: Um hum. And um, so they were born in what years? Do you recall?

Norm: Ah, Paul was born in 1952 and Dan was born in 1955.

Janet: Okay, so they're my generation.

Norm: Yep, and the younger one went to Oakton High School.

Janet: I was going to ask.

Norm: Paul, the older one went to Bishop O'Connell in Arlington.

Janet: Um hum. Nor how did he get to Bishop O'Connell? Did he have to be driven; did you all drive him in the morning?

Norm: I think there was a bus that use to leave from O.L.G.C. (Our Lady of Good Council School).

Janet: Um hum. Oh yes, okay. Back in the days when the Catholic schools still had a bus system.

Norm: Yeah.

Janet: Yes, which they got rid of not too long I think in the late 1980's.

Norm: If they hadn't gotten rid of it then they would now with the fuel costs.

Janet: Yes.

Norm: The bus transportation

Janet: Because I don't think the metro was out this far at point in time right? Because a lot of the kids who go there now and there are lots in the area, they go up to the Falls Church metro and go in and out that way.

Norm: The Vienna Metro in Oakton really didn't come into existence until 1986.

Janet: 1986.

Norm: If I remember that right.

Janet: Okay, yes. Well I was going to ask you then what was the rest of Oakton like in the late 1970's early 1980's? I mean obviously Oakton Glen was there what other neighborhoods do you recall were

Norm: When I first moved to the Vienna area and once in a while we would come way out in the country to Oakton.

Janet: (laughing) So there were still farms in Oakton?

Norm: Yeah a lot of

Janet: At that point?

Norm: Farms and I can remember going to the barber who had a little shop, Sheltra, I don't know if you know the name or not? If I can remember right it was near where the old Appalachian

Janet: Um hum.

Norm: I think he had a little store on the end of it or shop on the end of it at that time.

Janet: Oh.

Norm: And then Chet moved into Vienna and he opened up another Barber Shop there. But ah your food shopping it was pretty limited as far as Oakton was concerned. Most of it was ah had to be done in Vienna with what is now Magruders was the Acme.

Janet: Oh is that right I never knew it as Acme I always only knew it as Magruders.

Norm: Acme and also at one point it was Krueger's.

Janet: Hum, okay.

Norm: You're too young to remember that.

Janet and Linda: (laughing)

Linda: I wish.

Norm, Janet and Linda: (laughing)

Janet: Um, so was there a Safeway at the point in time in Vienna or I don't know how long the Safeway has been there.

Norm: Yes, I believe there was but not at it's, not at its present location.

Janet: Okay. And were there any other businesses in Oakton besides you said Appalachian Outfitters, the Barber Shop was there, at what point did the Shopping Center show up?

Norm: The Shopping Center, I'm trying to think whose – started in the 1950's, 1959, I don't think so – I think it started after that; cause most of our grocery shopping was done in Vienna.

Janet: Ah.

Norm: So until they opened up the Giant and then it was only a mile away you know.

Janet: Um hum. And um so really I mean the center of activity in terms of running errands and that sort of thing would have been for people to get in their cars and drive over to Vienna from here as opposed to just

Norm: Pretty much

Janet: Yeah, yeah.

Norm: at that point.

Janet: Ah um

Norm: I don't even remember if there was a bank at the time in Oakton. Of course now your

Janet: Bankton.

Norm: Between Oakton and Vienna now you've got 20 some banks.

Janet: It's unbelievable, unbelievable.

Norm: You're trying to compete with a number of gas stations. Cause you lost one in Oakton now that gas station – the Exxon.

Janet: So we had the Barber shop, we had Appalachian Outfitters for a while then the Oakton Shopping Center came into being and I guess that has sort of evolved but was it originally anchored by a Giant, Giant Store?

Norm: As far as I remember that was the biggest store.

Janet: Um hum then has CVS or its predecessor always been there as well?

Norm: Ah, before CVS there was – was it Drug Fair?

Janet: Um hum.

Norm: Drug Fair, then CVS. Those are the only two drug stores that I remember

Janet: Um Hum.

Norm: that has been in there.

Linda: In the 1970's, we moved here about 1975 – that there was a lovely dress shop in there for women.

Janet: Oh.

Linda: Just a wonderful, I can't think of the name off the top of my head but just a really, nice dress shop.

Norm: I didn't patronize that.

Janet, Linda, Norm: (laughing).

Janet: Norm remembers it well I'm sure.

Norm: I like that pink dress.

Linda: And the children's clothing store which came in there right after.

Janet: Oh Red Apple.

Linda: And was there right up until maybe two years ago.

Janet: Until – right – the renovation. Um I was also going to sort of go back to your children you said one went to Oakton High School and the other went to Bishop O’Connell. Where did they go to middle and elementary school?

Norm: Elementary School was O.L.G.C. Our Lady of Good Council.

Janet: Um hum.

Norm: And ah and Paul went from O.L.G.C. to do his seventh and eighth grade at Holy Trinity in Washington.

Janet: Oh my gosh. Were you the commuting father there with him?

Norm: Well we, fortunately I was working in Washington at the time.

Janet: Um hum.

Norm: At the Naval Security Station which was up not too far from there. And then when I got transferred to Ft. Meade then one of our neighbors use to drive in there and would take him in.

Janet: Um Hum.

Norm: So then finally he went to high school at O’Connell.

Janet: So O’Connell must have been built sometime during that period of

Norm: Yeah, it would have had to be in the 1960’s.

Janet: Um hum.

Norm: Well, and of course it has developed into quite a big

Janet: Oh yes, and Our Lady of Good Council Elementary School was sort of, I had children there too and at the time they entered the school still looked very – it had the early 1950’s façade this brick, two story brick building. And then we were there at the time when they began the renovation and the addition of the gymnasium on the school and then the new façade to the school, the science lab; that was my project to raise money for the science lab for the seventh and eighth

grade program. And that school has managed to maintain full enrollment through the years. I don't understand how they've managed it through all the ups and downs and the economy.

Norm: It's the economy and the price of tuition.

Janet: Yeah.

Norm: Tuition in the Catholic schools is pretty high these days.

Janet: Right.

Norm: I don't know if I would be able to afford it today.

Janet: I know, I know but it remains a tight knit community, don't you think?

Norm: Um hum.

Janet: Did you get many, in terms of – first I want to ask you what was specifically of are you allowed to say what kind of work you were doing at the Naval, was it the Naval Security Station?

Norm: Um hum.

Janet: What kind of work did you do there?

Norm: Pretty much classified work.

Janet: Okay.

Norm: I was an intelligence analysis at one point then I shifted into personnel work. I did a variety of work and wound up as a professional security officer.

Janet: Um hum.

Norm: And my last years were at Fort Meade because the agency had transferred finally, once they got their main, once they got their main buildings and all set.

Janet: Um hum, how long was the commute to Fort Meade from here?

Norm: Well, it wasn't all that bad cause we started pretty early, we had to be at work at 7 O'clock out there.

Janet: Oh.

Norm: And so we'd leave Tysons Corner maybe 5:45 or 6:00 O'clock

Janet: Um hum.

Norm: and carpooled.

Janet: Um hum.

Norm: And we'd get there in time if everything went well we would get there in time to have a cup of coffee at the cafeteria and you know.

Janet: Um hum.

Norm: And then in the afternoon we'd get through at 3:30 p.m.

Janet: Um hum.

Norm: and head back and if there were no accidents along the way we'd get home, you know, within the hour.

Janet: So you would basically take the beltway up to I95 is

Norm: Yeah.

Janet: I'm trying to figure I don't go up that way that often but

Norm: Yeah the beltway to I95.

Janet: Yeah.

Norm: And up there.

Janet: That must have been at least 45 miles?

Norm: Oh yeah 45 to 46 miles.

Janet: Yeah, that's quite a commute. By today's standards I guess that would take you about 3 hours or 20 (laughing) I don't know.

Norm: I tell the kids – we talk about it sometime – and I say well we use to do that in about an hour. Yeah but Dad there weren't that many cars on the road then. They talk like it was ancient history.

Janet: (laughing) Um, well I was also curious to again thinking a little more about family life; did your wife work outside the home? And I'm sorry I didn't catch her name.

Norm: Jacqueline.

Janet: Jacqueline, okay that's pretty.

Norm: She ah, she did work outside the home different times. She'd work for a while and then she'd stay home. Then work again, she did – her background was retail sales.

Janet: Um hum.

Norm: And she did some of that here in a couple of stores in Clarendon and then she worked for the government for a few years.

Janet: Um hum.

Norm: And then we moved to Fort Meade and she stayed home. And she passed away in May of 1996.

Janet: Oh my, so you've been a widower for 12 years.

Norm: Yes.

Janet: That's a long time.

Norm: And as I say my son Paul has been living with me and he's been a big help.

Janet: Um hum.

Norm: Especially for the last five or six years in the Real Estate, I let him do all the really hard work.

Janet: Um hum; all the leg work.

Norm: And all the tech work, he's good at that. He's good with the computers and all of that.

Janet: Um hum.

Norm: I can do the basics and what you need to get along.

Janet: Um hum.

Janet: What is the name or what group are you affiliated with, Realty group?

Norm: Long and Foster in Vienna.

Janet: Um hum and have you been with them all along?

Norm: I've been with them going on 17 years. I'd been with a couple of other outfits before.

Janet: Um hum.

Norm: Remember the old Myers and Hill in Vienna?

Janet: I don't but

Norm: Do you remember the old Myers and Hill?

Linda: I don't.

Norm: Mike Myers and Vernon Hill; and then Town and Country for a while.

Janet: Are they still around? Is Town and Country still in business?

Norm: Town and Country is very small now. The owner Baker who is the son of the original owner had an office over in Falls Church and I think they do a lot of property management.

Janet: Oh, okay.

Norm: Because I don't see many of their signs up for residential.

Janet: Um, yeah for years I don't think that I when I stop to think about it. Tell me a little bit about how the Real Estate business has evolved over time because you've got quite a perspective on it – you've been here before the hay day.

Norm: As you all know from reading the papers it goes in cycles.

Janet: Um hum.

Norm: We had a real hiatus 2005, 2006 and everything was going, you know you could list a house and turn around and have somebody waiting to buy it.

Janet: Um hum.

Norm: Of course that changed here in the last year and a half. But I think it's starting to turn the corner.

Janet: Um hum.

Norm: A little bit, not rushing but I think we're seeing things are opening up a little bit.

Janet: My brother who's got his own firm up in Loudon is saying the same thing. He said sometime around May/June houses were starting to come on the market. Some of them relisted with a more reasonable asking price, you know too sort of adjusted to reality bit that more.

Norm: Yeah the sellers took a while to learn or appreciate the fact that the market was regulating the sales you know.

Janet: Um hum.

Norm: The sellers still wanted their prices from a couple of years ago.

Janet: Um Hum.

Norm: And that wasn't going to happen.

Janet: Yeah.

Norm: We had a busy summer, we had – one house we put on the market it was sold in 16 days.

Janet: Oh, wow boy that's a dream come true for everyone.

Norm: Another one took 57 days

Janet: Wow.

Norm: which even that wasn't too bad in today's market.

Janet: Wow. Are most of your listings residential listings?

Norm: Yeah.

Janet: And how do you get the word out?

Norm: Well word of mouth one, referral you know friends and we put out a little newsletter every other month.

Janet: Um hum.

Norm: And ah every year I send out my calendars, send out Redskin schedules.

Janet: That makes you very popular I'm sure; the Redskins schedule. That's a great marketing idea I hadn't thought of that, I haven't gotten one of your Redskins schedule. So I hope you'll put me on your list. (Laughing)

Norm: I've got a couple in the car I'll bring a couple into you.

Janet: (Laughing) Ever ready the professional.

Norm, Janet, Linda: (Laughing)

Janet: A professional at heart. Um, I'm curious where in looking back and thinking where your sales and listings have been over the decades have you seen any sort of geographic movement?

Norm: Yeah, there was a lot of movement toward the outer suburbs.

Janet: Um hum.

Norm: Loudoun County, Warrenton, your brother should know and also Prince William County. Gainesville, I don't know if you are familiar with the Gainesville area?

Janet: Yeah.

Norm: My son and his wife bought a townhouse there three years ago.

Janet: Um hum.

Norm: And just even in those three years things have changed rapidly. Traffic for one it's sometimes worse than up here.

Janet: I agree.

Norm: You know.

Janet: I make the trip down route RT 29 quite often to Charlottesville and I dread going through Gainesville.

Norm: You've seen the big shopping center they have on the left there?

Janet: Yeah.

Janet: Linton Hall Road, Linton Hall Road.

Norm: Yeah, they are adding on another shopping center next to that original big one.

Janet: Yeah, it's amazing, but there's got to be enough to support that because there are every, all, so many of the farms out there have been sold off now.

Norm: Yep.

Janet: You know and there are big subdivisions going in, in all of those places. But here when you think back about to say to Hunter Mill Road was that largely rural in the 1970's and 1980's or were there houses being built then?

Norm: Very much, very much so cause when you move (referring to Linda) you moved in the 1970's out there.

Linda: Yes.

Norm: You would remember that as being fairly rural.

Linda: Yes, there were farms along there, they weren't being farmed or

Norm: And you had quite a place out there yourself.

Linda: We had horses yes.

Norm: I remember that, but the other thing I do in Real Estate is I've been concentrating a lot over the years on the seniors market.

Janet: That's on my list to ask you.

Norm: That works out fairly well in a lot of cases, but other cases you run into the resistance of the seniors who have been in their homes so long that they just find it difficult to realize, you know that the day is coming when they have to make a move. But a lot of them who are still independent and can maintain their home or have people come in and take care of your know the lawn and the repairs and all that.

Janet: Um hum.

Norm: That's why I encourage them to do that.

Janet: Yes.

Norm: Ah, but I'm working on a couple of cases right now of seniors, one we talked to two years ago who called us and said they wanted to sell the house and well he's taking little steps and doing things that we recommended. And another one is – his family convinced him to move to the Virginian Assisted Living and the house is still empty and still full of furniture.

Janet: Oh dear.

Norm: There are eight children in the family and I guess they have a tough time pulling them together from parts of different states where they live you know.

Janet: Um hum.

Norm: Some are local and some are – but a lot has to be done to that particular house.

Janet: And there are so many, as you know emotional issues associated with getting consensus in a family in a situation like that and getting decisions made.

Norm: I recognize that.

Janet: Yes.

Norm: And I find it very difficult if I feel or see that in their situation that they can remain independent I say hang onto it. I'm not going to hold a gun to their heads.

Janet: Um hum absolutely.

Linda: If I could just interject – I've talked with people who have dealt with Norm over the years, and that's a part of your reputation that you aren't – sometimes you think of the typical real estate person that's just coming in and forcing somebody to sell their house or being high pressure or whatever – but Norm is not, he is very considerate of the person and their needs and

Janet: Circumstances.

Linda: Exactly.

Norm: Thank you I appreciate that.

Janet: Well Norm I do want to ask you about a few other things but I did want to just bring the whole real estate thing to – narrow it a little bit.

When you arrived, would it be accurate to say when you arrived and began your real estate career part time while you were still involved in your other career that you basically followed your generation through its progress over time. Would you say that most of the early sales were to people like you with young families?

Norm: Yes that's true.

Janet: And that over time when they wanted to move or move to a larger house, smaller house they've come to you.

Norm: In many cases. But you know everybody has a friend in real estate.

Janet: (Laughing)

Norm: Or a relative so that people that you may have dealt with at one point and then you find out that they've moved or bought.

Janet: Yes.

Norm: And then when you run into them and say you know they tell you that they've moved well they win she moved she (meaning Linda) didn't call me.

Janet: Um Hum.

Janet, Linda and Norm: (Laughing)

Norm: Anyway.

Janet: She had a buyer with that; she didn't have a real estate agent.

Norm: Well good.

Janet: She bought

Linda: We had a friend who was waiting to buy our house whenever we were ready to move.

Norm: There see.

Janet: Yeah.

Norm: Yeah, yeah that's why you know. I don't have a problem with that and I don't have a problem with people who you now like ah – well I have a good example we had a neighbor who moved in about three years ago; a navy couple. And of course it was another agent that sold them the house. And now they're

being transferred to California and of course they're using the same agent and that's fine even though they knew and they liked us.

Janet: Um hum, um hum.

Norm: She was nice enough to come over and tell us the story you know, that they were moving and they were dealing with the agent that they were friendly with.

Janet: Um hum.

Norm: It's hard to accept the fact that you've got a for sale sign right next door to you.

Janet: Yes, sure.

Norm: But ah I, we've pretty much made a point of not farming our own neighborhood. You know sometimes you're too close to the

Janet: Yes. My brother has some experience with that too I think he's learning that lesson. He hasn't been in the business as long as you, but

Norm: Um hum.

Janet: yes but he started out very much working with his neighborhood and realized that he's got that's got its pluses and minuses, it definitely does.

Well you know I know you had mentioned that your family was that you had children at O.L.G.C. and I assume that that was the church that you were attending, is that correct?

Norm: Um hum.

Janet: And have you had any volunteer involvement at the church beyond being involved with the school?

Norm: Years back, years back when I was younger I belonged to the men's club.

Janet: Um hum.

Norm: And then we had annual, different from what they have now, like call it a carnival day and we had booths and everything.

Janet: Um hum, um hum.

Norm: A group of men would work it up and you know and draw the crowds. And we would have a beer booth.

Janet: Um hum.

Norm: At that time we had the nuns.

Janet: It was popular awe – oh (laughing) were they serving the beer?

Norm: No, they weren't serving but they ah – one particular time rain was threatening and the nuns were out watching and I got a hold of one of the nuns and I said "you sisters better pray for some good weather here or else we won't serve you any beer". She said we're going to start praying.

Janet: (Laughing.) So are there no nuns left in the convent there – I mean the, ah, whatever the house is that they call, I forget what they call it.

Norm: No, teaching?

Janet: Um huh.

Norm: I think there is one nun in the residence.

Janet: In residence.

Norm: But the order, the order that was there got either

Janet: There was a Sister Ann who was the principle for a while and then she retired or went on to a school back in Cleveland I think. But I don't know if she was the only non-teaching. This would have been back in early or the late mid-nineties when my children were there.

Norm: Um hum. It's quite a change over and of course it is all lay teachers now. That's why the tuition has gone up again.

Janet: Yeah, you have to be, you have to pay those people right?

Norm: People have to earn a living and have to have a decent salary.

Janet: Um hum and were there any other organizations that you were active in professionally or as a volunteer.

Norm: The ah, right now I'm a member of what they call the CAAB the board it's the Community Action Advisory Board which advocates what the Supervisors do. Well the needs and the aspirations and concerns of the poor.

Janet: Um hum.

Norm: Or low income population.

Janet: So it's an official Fairfax County Board.

Norm: Yes, it is.

Janet: That it advises the Board of Supervisors.

Norm: Yes.

Janet: Um huh and how long have you been serving on that?

Norm: I'm in my fourth year now and they just renewed my. And I represent the American Association of Retired People (AARP) chapter from Vienna.

Janet: Um hum.

Norm: And that's another organization I belong to and volunteered and served as President about six years ago.

Janet: Oh, wow.

Norm: No big deal. (Laughing)

Janet: Well that's a significant part of the local population though.

Norm: Yeah.

Janet: Yeah.

Norm: And ah I'm also a member of the American Legion

Janet: Um hum.

Norm: Post in Vienna.

Janet: Um hum.

Norm: Post 180. And I serve on – I'm a member of, the, their Executive Committee.

Janet: Um hum.

Norm: All titles sound good but there's no remuneration.

Janet: I know, I know.

Norm: That's why they call it volunteer – right?

Janet: Right. (Laughing) Um, I'm curious to ask what – you know back to the CAAB what kinds of issues are you seeing these days that, you know, that the people you represent or advocate for are dealing with – what are the most pressing concerns?

Norm: I think affordable housing.

Janet: Um hum.

Norm: Child care.

Janet: And do you all ever do you have any representatives from those particular constituency type groups who serve on the Board as well or do you all sort of act as the link to those groups? How does it work?

Norm: They do have representatives from the lower income segments.

Janet: Um hum.

Norm: People are appointed; most of them are appointed by the Supervisors.

Janet: Um hum.

Norm: The ah, mine wasn't appointed by a Supervisor but I was a member of the AARP but most are appointed by the Supervisors - the past president Norman St. Louis well you may know him or not.

Janet: I recognize the name, um hum.

Norm: He suggested some years ago that I volunteer for that. So it's been a good experience. I do a lot of listening more than yacking. But it's interesting.

Janet: Um hum. Circling back to the American Legion I know the Post here has been a very long – been here for a long time and is a very dedicated group of people. My father served in the Post out in Springfield when he was alive and I'm curious he was always concerned the last; oh I would say the last 20 years or so about bringing in younger members of the community. And has there been at least in the Springfield Post but I'm curious about how things are going is the American Legion – does it continue to have a future going forward?

Norm: Oh yes because you have not only the American Legion members themselves but you have what they call the Sons of the Legion.

Janet: Ah.

Norm: And then you have of course the auxiliary – the Ladies Auxiliary.

Janet: Um hum.

Norm: And ah they are very community oriented; we have what they call Boy's State and Girl's State and then they provide, I think we provide six scholarships or partial scholarships anyway.

Janet: Um hum.

Norm: And they have oratorical contests.

Janet: Um hum and how do they raise money to support these things in the community that they do?

Norm: Well, a lot of the money they have, well they have a bar at the Post and they have and of course they serve breakfast and lunch.

Janet: Um hum, oh wow. So it's a real club in other words.

Norm: Yes, they don't serve dinners but after two o'clock you can get little microwave pizzas or microwave hamburger if you want.

Janet: Um hum, um hum.

Norm: But it's a very progressive very community minded. They participate, you know, in the Halloween parade they have 911 ceremony that's coming up in September and ah

Janet: I remember my Dad's Post always supported or sponsored a Little League team or you know one of the little soccer teams or something. I remember that was a big deal.

Norm: Yeah, they sponsor a baseball team but it's in the older 18.

Janet: Which is great because those kids need opportunities, so many of them don't have them if you don't make the high school team

Norm: Right

Janet: you know that's it. Ah, and I have a very dear memory of the American Legion because my father always did the color guard during the Fourth of July parade in our community and one of the things he bequeathed to my children – I have three boys and they are young was his old helmet and basically it was a World War II helmet that had been painted white with the American Legion thing on the front which is what he wore during those days when he did the color guard. They all you know and it was always very exciting to stand on the sidelines at the parade and see the color guard and say oh, there's Daddy, there's Daddy you know. But that helmet is still a very prized object in our family and when my little, now my little nephews because I'm the oldest of eight children when my brothers and sisters little nephews come over that is the first thing they ask us is where is the

Norm: Helmet.

Janet: (laughing) So anyway I know that always tickled my father so much and as a fellow American Legion member I thought I should share that little story with you. So the tradition lives on.

Norm: It does, it does. My father was a member of the Legion back in Massachusetts and when I came out of the service, you know, he took me over and wanted me to join up. But back then it was sort of a different – there wasn't what you call community oriented.

Janet: Um hum.

Norm: It was a place where a bunch of guys would get together and play cards.

Janet: (laughing).

Norm: Nice Dad, you want to go bowling Dad? I'll go bowling with you.

Janet: (laughing) That's cute. Well I do want to sort of conclude our time together today by just asking a couple more questions if you'll bear with me. One thing I was quite interested in was you said early in the interview that your, many of your contemporaries have stayed in the area rather than retire out of the area.

Norm: Um hum.

Janet: And obviously you chose to do likewise. Why did you choose to stay in the area as opposed to going to Florida or someplace like that?

Norm: Well I guess one thing my two sons lived in the area and they – but backtracking a little bit on that subject. My wife of course was from same town, same city and she always wanted to go back there. She had a twin sister and of course her parents were living then. But for thirty years it was always a fight not a fight but a bone of contention

Janet: Um hum.

Norm: to move back up there. But we tried a couple of times, you know, to get reassigned up there at the Naval Base or something like that. Anyways it never worked out but of course when she died I flew her back up there to be buried in our cemetery up there.

Janet: Aw, aw.

Norm: I said well you've gone back.

Janet: Yes.

Norm: But her twin sister died before she did.

Janet: Oh, how awful.

Norm: So that sort of calmed things down.

Janet: Um hum, um hum. Cause that was the main draw for her was to be there closer to her sister.

Norm: Yeah.

Janet: Ah huh and um are you glad that you stayed?

Norm: Yeah I am, I have no problem we – I go back; my son and I go back and visit. I don't have any immediately family left up there but I have two close cousins that were like sisters to me.

Janet: Um hum.

Norm: And they always looked after my sister and my mother up there.

Janet: How nice.

Norm: And my cousins now one is 91 and the other one is 88 and they both have their little afflictions.

Janet: Um hum, um hum.

Norm: Might go back – haven't been there in about two years. Either you go on vacation or else you go up for a funeral you know.

Janet: Right, right.

Norm: That happens to everybody. But we haven't been up in two years so we might take a trip in the fall.

Janet: Um hum. That's a beautiful time to go.

Norm: I won't go in the summer because my relatives don't have air conditioning up there.

Janet: (laughing) Do you know I had my first experience in Massachusetts in August last year when my youngest son was looking at some colleges in the Massachusetts area and we stayed with a step cousin. My husband's, my father's wife that he married after my mother died and her daughter kindly put us up. And it was 99 degrees which was extremely rare as it turns out. But they were in this beautiful neighborhood Arlington Heights or something like that outside of Boston and there was no air conditioning in that house. And we were dying but low and behold as soon as the sun went down everything cooled off very, very quickly. And beautiful breezes coming through and

Norm: That's the difference up there.

Janet: Yes, yes, here it's still hot in the evening many time you know. It wasn't humid it was just hot.

Norm: My one cousin up there she'll even if it's 99 degrees she'll wear a sweater.

Janet: (laughing).

Norm: And sit out in the sun.

Janet: (laughing) Well it feels good on the bones.

Linda: Yeah.

Janet: It feels good on the bones after a certain point in time I've discovered personally.

And then one last question; in thinking about four decades that you have been in this area – five decades – four decades in the Vienna/Oakton area how would you say it has most changed? I mean what are the things when you think of how it's different from when you arrived, what are the things that stand out in your mind?

Norm: I guess traffic for one.

Janet: Um hum.

Norm: Ah, the commercial development, shopping, major shopping areas; Tyson's; and of course housing.

When I got out of the Navy I decided to stay in the area because one thing I was still working for the government. And I had been working for the government up in Newport, Rhode Island apart from my hometown. And when I came down here I was in the Navy and when I started looking around the civilian population then I realized that the grades down here were better than out in the field.

Janet: Oh, that

Norm: A big difference.

Janet: Oh, that's interesting, very interesting.

Norm: So having 10 years of service already; so I decided to stay down here and further my career in government.

Janet: Well, so the little rumor I use to hear as I was growing up in the area was that, because I lived in a neighborhood built by Yonas in Springfield we lived very similar to

Norm: Vienna Woods.

Janet: Yes, every time I go through Vienna Woods over to the little league field I feel like I'm home again you know. But I remember people saying with all the

government – everybody was an Army, Navy, at the pentagon or somewhere you know Naval Research Lab. Somewhere. David, was it David Parker, what was the name of the place right over the river there where they do all the Navy research for submarines and stuff – but anyway a lot of friends and neighbors who worked there and then who were also government employees and sort of Colonel level people and so forth. And the rumor use to be and I don't know whether this was true but it sounds like maybe this was where the source of the rumor originated was that Washington was considered hazardous duty. (Laughing) So you got more pay by being in Washington because it had long ago been designated sort of not hazardous duty but something like it was because it was swampy and it was hot and humid and it was so many mosquitoes and so forth that they bumped up peoples pay in compensation for the quality of life here.

Norm: That was only in certain fields.

Janet: Okay.

Norm: Like engineering, mathematician things like that.

Janet: Oh, okay. But there was some grain of truth to all that then.

Norm: And you want to remember back to when I change over here from Navy military to civilian at that time you did not have all the technical or technology people or firms in the area like you have now.

Janet: Um hum. Oh, so that's a significant change.

Norm: So now even though the government may still be one of your major employers but your technology field and other fields

Janet: I know everybody that I know who is retired from the active service has gone to defense work in the private sector, especially in the intelligence and technical fields.

Norm: Um hum.

Janet: But at that point in time you're saying I guess that really wasn't an option. There weren't

Norm: Yes

Janet: You went from military to government.

Norm: Or else you went to law school.

Janet: Right.

Norm: Or you went into a professional field.

Janet: Well may I formally thank you for your service to our country all those years of your life and spent helping the nation.

Norm: As I say I didn't retire from the military.

Janet: I know but you went and worked for the government however.

Norm: My total service was about five years in the military a little over five; but 39 years total

Janet: Absolutely.

Norm: in the military and government.

Janet: Well thank you very much wow and plus all the stuff you've done in the community since then.

Norm: Well I don't feel I've contributed much to your

Janet: No, this is exactly what we want, this is exactly what we want and we appreciate it so very, very much and will be in touch with you to

Norm: You are more than welcome and when you violate my privacy act.

Janet: (Laughing)

Norm: I can sue, I can sue you and retire again.

Janet: (laughing) I'm just a volunteer and you're a government employee (meaning Linda) so (laughing) we don't have anything.

Linda: That old TV program "This is Your Life"

Norm: This is my life

Linda: Norm Fissett.

Janet: Well thank you again Mr. Fissett it has just been a delight to have a chance to talk to you, we appreciate it.

Linda: Thank you.

Norm: The name is Norm.